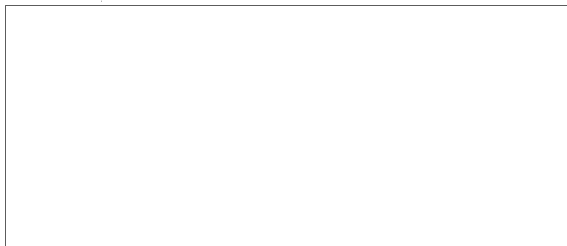


THE DIRECTOR OF  
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

• National Intelligence Council

29 March 1983



STAT

There has appeared on my desk the attached critique of the paper on Soviet Nationalities in German Wartime Strategy by Alex Alexiev. In view of the fact that I'm drawing on Alexiev's paper for some of our current work, I would be interested in any rebuttal on this critique that might be made.

Sincerely,

Henry S. Rowen  
Chairman

Attachment

The RAND report, "Soviet Nationalities in German Wartime Strategy, 1941-1945," argues that Soviet minorities participated in the German war effort in "unprecedented numbers," providing "a major contribution to the German war effort." (p.vi) Minority collaboration with the Nazi regime is traced to the "anti-Soviet and nationalist sentiments" of non-Russians.

These conclusions are in serious conflict with the available evidence. Many Soviet citizens (of all nationalities) collaborated with German authorities during the war. To a large degree, however, this participation was not voluntary. This is particularly true of those prisoners of war who were "recruited" for military duty. Archival materials containing the testimony of former German officers who were closely involved with Soviet 'volunteers' indicate that the primary motive of those captured Soviet soldiers who served in the "volunteer" units was survival. Conditions in German prisoner-of-war camps were so bad that large numbers of captives saw collaboration with the Germans as the only alternative to starvation or illness. This comment applies to both ethnic Russians and non-Russians.

Contrary to the RAND report, which argues that anti-Russian and nationalist sentiments provided the primary motive for collaboration, evidence from former Germans indicates that such motives played a role for only a small minority of the volunteers. One German who served in various volunteer units (mainly of Caucasian and Turkic soldiers) from September 1942 to the end of the war noted:

In contrast to this small group (of idealists) was the bulk of the volunteers, who, I am convinced did not fight for the cause but solely for the purpose of gaining personal advantages.... Distress, simply, prompted most of them to change sides. The horrible conditions prevailing in most of the camps induced them to consider this last hope. The prospect of good food, clothing, and all the privileges of a German soldier as compared to the hunger, cold, and sickness which were certain if they remained captive for a longer period of time, was their motive for enlisting. (National Archives. MS #C-043, pp. 10-11. See also P018).

In fact, the German tactic of relying on minority nationalist appeals as a primary recruitment technique among captured Soviets appears to have been a major error. First, the tactic meant that recruitment efforts were effectively limited to non-Russians, and a large pool of potential collaborations -- the ethnic Russians -- was not exploited. The response to the abortive appeal to form a pro-German force of ethnic Russians indicates that many ethnic Russian POWs, when given the choice between collaboration and the desperate conditions in the camps, "volunteered" as enthusiastically as their non-Russian counterparts. Second, the German preoccupation with the appeal to minority nationalism led to misplaced trust in the non-Russian cadres. As noted by one former German participant in the minority program:

I am firmly convinced that many a soldier on the German side transplanted his exaggerated nationalistic feelings into the minds of members of the Caucasian and Turkic peoples and expected them to be imbued with an idealism which to such an extent could never be accepted as a norm for all these peoples. While this conception was regarded as a basic and natural hypothesis as far as the activation of volunteer units is concerned, it constituted the first grave mistake which was automatically followed by certain errors in the evaluation of volunteers (MS #C-043, p. 22).

A related point which was not brought out in the RAND report is the degree to which the collaboration of Soviets with German authorities was opportunistic. Commenting on the effectiveness of German efforts to propagandize Soviet POWs, a former German general noted, "effectiveness decreased as soon as reverses on the German front became known." (MS #P-018).

The RAND report also presents a distorted picture of the reliability of minority soldiers "recruited" to the German cause. The conclusion (p. 30) that Baltic national units fighting for the Germans "amassed a distinguished combat record" is contradicted by archival data indicating that at least some of the military contingents from these areas were totally unreliable (D-061). Throughout the "volunteer" units, there were incidents involving assaults on German officers, and there were also cases when the units were infiltrated by pro-Soviet minorities. Speaking of the Turkic division, one former participant conceded: "Important successes were never achieved, nor could this venture be regarded as a noticable aid to the services."

In short, the use of Soviet captives in the German war effort involved costs, as well as benefits. While many Soviet prisoners of all nationalities proved receptive to German collaboration if the alternative was death in the camps, the primary motive was survival, not hostility to the Russians.